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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0308  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 0184  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1065  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 3190  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0205  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0042  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 001580

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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PM](#)  
SUBJECT: GOP PITCHES REGIONAL HEALTH SCHOOL AS WAY TO BOOST  
DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

Classified By: Ambassador William A. Eaton - Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) The GOP hopes for strong U.S. support to establish a "School of Health for the Americas" in Panama. With students and faculty drawn from throughout the hemisphere, the school is aimed at improving healthcare delivery, particularly to poor communities. In so doing, the GOP believes it could also help to bolster democracy in the region by countering Cuba's inroads through medical diplomacy. Minister of Health Camilo Alleyne stressed the GOP's firm commitment to the initiative and its hope to launch the school as early as January 2007. As Panama offers several advantages with its location and existing infrastructure, this proposal offers a unique opportunity. Post stands ready to provide any support necessary to advance further USG engagement on this initiative. End summary.

Fortifying Democracy through Health Education  
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12. (SBU) On August 9, Minister of Health Camilo Alleyne told Econ Chief, visiting HHS staff, and several GOP health officials that the primary aim of a proposed "School of Health for the Americas" is to fortify democracy and health in Latin America by improving the delivery of healthcare and boosting the development of poor communities throughout the region. The GOP hopes that strong USG participation on what would start as a bilateral effort will encourage subsequent participation from other countries. Alleyne appreciated HHS Secretary Leavitt's strong interest and said that Costa Rica, Chile, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico, appear very supportive. He also said that several Caribbean governments, as well as private sector and academic institutions (including Johns Hopkins) have expressed interest. He stressed President Torrijos' support and the GOP's commitment to deliver the infrastructure, know-how, and financing (starting with \$1.5 million) to open the school as early as January 2007 and to ensure long-term viability.

Panama's Perspective and Its Advantages  
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¶3. (U) Dr. Enrique Mendoza, former Dean of the University of Panama's Medical School, presented the GOP's concept of a bilingual school offering inter-disciplinary training for both health care workers and policymakers drawn from throughout Latin America. With faculty from various parts of the region, the school would emphasize ways to meet twenty-first century health challenges, poverty-related diseases (e.g., TB and malaria), chronic disease (e.g., cardiovascular illnesses), and health crises brought on by epidemics, natural disasters, or conflicts (e.g., Avian Flu and HIV/AIDS). It would provide training for technicians (e.g., support staff for nursing, emergency rooms, radiology, etc.), particularly those drawn from poor and indigenous communities. The school would also offer post-graduate programs, clinical research, and basic research activities.

¶4. (U) Mendoza and Alleyne stressed that, in addition to the GOP's strong support, Panama offers several unique advantages, including:

- using the former U.S. military hospital at the old Howard Air Force Base as a "teaching hospital;"
- linking the school to Panama's "City of Knowledge," which already brings together academic, civil society, government, and international development organizations;
- further linkages to the Gorgas Memorial Institute (GMI), Panama's Secretariat for Science, Technology, and Innovation, and the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI); and,
- Panama's emergence as a regional aviation hub and the presence of an existing airfield at Howard.

¶5. (SBU) GMI Director Jorge Motta maintained that the USG's best legacy in Panama was not the Panama Canal, but instead it was the promotion of clean water and public health. As

Panama contemplates the modernization of the Canal in an upcoming referendum, he suggested that strong USG participation in launching this regional health school could represent a parallel effort to modernize the region's healthcare and further cement the longstanding USG-GOP partnership on public health.

Re-Framing the "School of the Americas?"

¶6. (C) Alleyne recognized that the "School of Health for the Americas" name might conjure up negative connotations from the old "School of the Americas." He appeared amenable to some other formulation, but said he liked the name precisely because it offers a chance to re-define the name. Moreover, he said that Fidel Castro would undoubtedly jump at a chance to get in on such an effort, if it offered him a chance to show up the U.S. as an advocate for beating swords into ploughshares.

¶7. (C) Alleyne was emphatic about the need to counter the growing influence of Cuban-trained medical personnel in the region. He said that these personnel return to their poor communities from Cuba with their marginal medical skills and strong Communist indoctrination. Alleyne maintained that leftists have significantly increased their presence in Panama's poor communities, suggesting that their penetration has gone from only about 4% to some 25% in just the past few years.

Comment: A Unique Opportunity

¶8. (C) This proposal offers a unique opportunity to boost U.S. transformational diplomacy in the region, which could certainly help to promote security, democracy, and prosperity. Post appreciates that Washington agencies are looking closely at the idea and we stand ready to provide any support necessary to advance further USG engagement. End comment.  
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